

Reluctant Don Juan

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oh, he's so sad and broken and ridden with guilt. i
want to fuck him.

—@holyches (X/Twitter) — 6/7/2023



He is handsome, sexy, and tall. Kind, honest, charismatic, affectionate.

He has everything it takes to be the prince charming of your dreams and to make the relationship work... until, from one day to the next, he disappears. Or he leaves. Or he breaks things off. Always with the same refrain: that he's not enough for you, that you deserve better, that he's not in a good place.

Months later, talking to an acquaintance, you find out that he was with her too. And with her friend. And with her friend's friend. He left all of them the same way he left you. With the same words. With the same guilt. With the same flight.

In short, you were involved with an **Reluctant Don Juan**: *Someone as desirable as he is incapable of sustaining what he awakens. So sexy... that he hates himself.*

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Careful!

It should not be confused with the [Broken Ace](#), so perfect that their hidden trauma is what defines them; nor with the bad boy who, deep down, is good and practices his donjuanism as revenge against the world, [the Casanova](#) and similar tropes.

The Reluctant Don Juan does not want to be a Don Juan, even though he knows that he is.

He does not seduce intentionally, nor in search of pleasure, like the traumatized bad boy, the “so ugly he’s handsome” type, or the classic [Don Juan](#). Nor is he unaware of his seductive power, like the nerd who gets lucky without knowing it or someone with Parker Luck.

What defines him is something else:

- He is so broken that he sincerely believes leaving is the right thing to do.
- That walking away from the other person is an act of care.
- That disappearing is, at its core, a twisted form of love.

He is, in shorts, a subversion of the Don Juan while maintaining the core of the trope: ***Seduction is not power, but a symptom of how destroyed he is in the inside.***

Antecedent of the Trope

The proto-Reluctant Don Juan can be traced back to [Don Juan](#) (1819) by [Lord Byron](#). In this satirical poem, Don Juan is not portrayed as an active womanizer, but rather as a young man easily seduced by the women he encounters throughout his life. This inversion of the myth—a Don Juan who is desired rather than desiring—anticipates the central dynamic of the modern **Reluctant Don Juan**: seduction as a consequence of emotional connection, not as a conscious objective.

Core Characteristics of the Reluctant Don Juan

- He is neither the charismatic asshole capable of breaking your heart over and over again, nor the poor misunderstood soul. He exists in an uncomfortable space somewhere in between.
- Unlike the first definition of the [Broken Ace](#), he is not a [Villain with Good Publicity](#), but he is not innocent either. He is a man with a deeply distorted sense of love, though not driven by malicious intent.
- His seduction does not stem from the trauma or traumas themselves, nor from ego—as is the case in other similar tropes—but from the pain those traumas cause.
- He possesses a foundational initial trauma, which is reinforced by many subsequent traumas. This functions more as a continuous erosion than a single defining wound, and it is reversible.
- Archetypes such as the [Knight in Sour Armor](#), the [Lone Wolf](#), the *Bitter Old Man* (even if he is not literally old), and similar figures are the most common.
- Another defining characteristic is that he is aware that he possesses a certain degree of attractiveness, or that he is skilled in certain areas, but unlike many instances of the Broken Ace, he does not boast about it. He does not even do so when flirting. What often draws women to him is a combination of attractiveness, humility, honesty, and the sadness they see in his eyes, among other similar traits.
- He is not the typical romantasy antagonist, the fuckboy who tells you “*I don’t deserve you,*” “*I’m going to hurt you,*” “*I’m not that kind of guy,*” “*don’t fucking catch feelings, babe, I’m broken inside,*” and then stays with you anyway. He doesn’t say it—because he doesn’t feel worthy of being shared—and sooner or later, he ends up abandoning you because of it.
- Unlike the previously mentioned casanova, he initially appears as the female ideal of masculinity, both in physical attractiveness and in demeanor. Not “*the interesting guy,*” but the prototype. The man who seems to have stepped out of [Pride and Prejudice](#), or out of modern romantasy made flesh: attractive, well-mannered, intense, seemingly confident... but carrying deeply ingrained trauma or traumas and an inner sadness so intense that it is often mistaken for depth.
- He should not be confused with people who suffer from [Borderline Personality Disorder](#)^[W]. Although the pattern of abandonment motivated by self-hatred may appear similar, it is not the same phenomenon. The Reluctant Don Juan can build stable, long-term relationships; in fact, he often does. The breakup does not arise from constant instability, but from

the return of the trauma or traumas, which resurface forcefully from within his own mind.

- His behavior, as has already been stated, is linked to an initial trauma that is later reinforced by subsequent traumas, usually related to a key woman (though this is not always the case), which gives rise to his behavior as a Reluctant Don Juan.
- A self-fulfilling prophecy: In trying to “*protect*” the other person from the worst parts of himself, he ends up destroying them.
- He should not be confused with the “*I can fix him/her*” trope. He is not a man waiting to be saved by a woman’s love. He is so broken that only he can fix himself, and any external attempt to do so usually fails or accelerates his flight.
- **Sex as escape:** Although this trait is shared with other similar tropes, there is a notable difference here. There is no satirical framing—meaning no male nymphomania, nor sex addiction as such, caused by a specific factor. It is not driven by revenge, nor by pleasure, nor by a trauma that directly produces that behavior. Sex is usually employed as a way to cover up the pain generated by the trauma or traumas; it is not caused by the trauma itself. To use a simple analogy, it is like “*forgetting through alcohol*”, one does not forget the memory or memories themselves, but the pain they cause. In this sense, flirting and subsequent sex are used to seek a connection that momentarily removes the weight he carries, even if only for a few instants. Within this trope, there is no single “*woman in the refrigerator*.” There may be several: one initial figure, often linked to the foundational trauma, and others that only reinforce the sense of being unfit for a stable relationship. Each breakup does not free the character; it sinks him a little deeper into his conviction that leaving is the right thing to do.
- He has a type—yes—but with nuances. The “*type*” of an Reluctant Don Juan usually goes beyond the physical and enters the personal, because what he seeks is not a vague memory of that key woman, but to feel something similar to what he felt with the key woman. This does not mean that physical appearance is not an influencing factor—it is—but it is not the defining one, as it is with the traumatized bad boy who uses donjuanism as revenge against the world, or in many cases, against the woman who caused the trauma. Here, the attraction operates through emotional associations, not traits. In other words, he may approach a woman because she is a redhead, for example, because the woman tied to his foundational

trauma was a redhead—but this is not the key factor, merely one of many elements that draw him closer.

- A predominantly male trope. Its female counterpart is *The Mantis Who Was Not Hungry*.

Examples of Reluctant Don Juan include:

Animation

- **Bruce Wayne** (*Batman Beyond* series): Bruce Wayne, although he also falls under the Don Juan trope, can—depending on the continuity, as is the case in the animated series *Batman Beyond*—be considered an Reluctant Don Juan, as he is not as boastful as characters such as **Tony Stark** in **Marvel**. In that series, in one particular episode—specifically the one in which Ra’s al Ghul transfers his consciousness into a clone of his deceased daughter’s body—we see, at the end, an elderly Bruce, after the future Batman has gone out on patrol, looking through photographs of several of his past romantic relationships, until he reaches his first love, Talia al Ghul. To her, unlike the others, he dedicates the words: “*rest well, my beloved.*” That is, a key woman whose loss, and the trauma associated with it, gives rise to Bruce’s behavior as a Reluctant Don Juan, as a way of coping with the pain he carries.

Fan Fiction

- **Putnam Pitch** (*The Witcher Fanon*): Putnam Pitch, the founder of the **School of the Crane**, is a character from The Witcher Universe that exemplifies perfectly the Reluctant Don Juan trope. Tall, handsome, kind, charismatic, approachable, attractive, highly skilled at his work as a witcher—and yet, after losing his first wife and his adopted son, his romantic relationships become a complete disaster. They are driven less by a desire to move on than by a need to reclaim his humanity, to seek the sense of connection he once felt with her. Over time, as further losses accumulate—other women of great importance (such as **Jolanta Dinmarb**) appeared and emotional failures happened (such as a ten-year marriage that ended in a terrible divorce)—Pitch is gradually transformed into a Reluctant Don Juan. Haunted not by the ghosts of the past, but by their lingering sparks.

Literature

- [Geralt of Rivia](#) ([The Witcher Books](#)) : In the short stories and in the midquel *Season of Storms*, Geralt can be read as an Reluctant Don Juan. He sleeps with several women—[Iola](#), [Lytta Neyd](#), [Mozaik](#), among others—because each of them reminds him, to some degree, of his first “*woman in the refrigerator*” ([Renfri](#)) and of the second woman who broke him ([Yennefer](#)). This differs in the video games, where Geralt was aesthetically enhanced for marketability and given a looser, more stoic attitude compared to the books, where he is burdened by trauma and self-esteem issues that manifest throughout many of his internal monologues.

Tabletop RPGs (and, to some extent, video games)

- [Johnny Silverhand](#) ([Cyberpunk 2013/2020/2077](#)): Johnny is, narratively, an almost textbook Reluctant Don Juan, only wrapped in noise, rage, and nihilism. The elements that firmly place him within the trope are the following: the trauma—or rather, traumas— not romantic in nature however, but war-related and existential: war itself, the system, the mutilated body, the loss of meaning. Added to this are two key women, not one: [Alt Cunningham](#), an absolute and irreversible loss, frozen in guilt; and [Rogue Amadiæ](#), a turbulent, intermittent relationship, impossible to fully close. Johnny attempts to substitute one for the other. Alt and Rogue function as emotional poles between which he oscillates, and when that is no longer enough, other people enter the picture—women, and depending on the continuity (as mentioned in *Cyberpunk 2077*) and by Johnny’s own words, men as well due to of a hunger for connection. This fits perfectly with what has already been defined for the trope: sex as anesthetic, not conquest; flirting as a desperate attempt to feel something that quiets the noise; repetition not as enjoyment, but as reiterated failure. It is also important to note that Johnny is aware that he is charismatic and attractive. He boasts, performs, provokes—but that does not make him vengeful or a typical casanova. His donjuanism is not “*look what I can do*,” but rather, “*look what I cannot sustain*.”

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